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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001198

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [TU](#)  
SUBJECT: TURKEY: PRO-KURDISH PARTY'S NEW STRATEGY TO ENTER  
PARLIAMENT

REF: A. ANKARA 965

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1179

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4(b),(d)

1.(U) Summary: In Turkey's July 22 elections, the Democratic Society Party (DTP) is aiming to end a 13-year absence of pro-Kurdish representation in parliament by running candidates as independents. The party hopes to persuade supporters that DTP will pass the 10 per cent election threshold and is not a "throw-away" vote. DTP is also courting prominent Kurds and leftists from outside the party to run under its "pro-Kurdish, pro-democracy" umbrella. While DTP's prediction of winning around 50 seats is overly optimistic, even naysayers predict the party will win the 20 seats necessary for official parliamentary group status. In a move expected to lessen independent candidates' (and DTP's) chances, parliament passed and the President signed a constitutional amendment requiring that independents be listed on the main ballot rather than separate slips -- a measure some predict will confuse DTP's less educated and illiterate voters. Current legal scrutiny of DTP could bring about a closure case, and is likely to limit which DTP'ers are eligible to run. One factor sure to throw the party's plans into chaos would be resumption of military-PKK clashes in the region. End summary.

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DTP Organizing Bloc of Pro-Kurdish Independent Candidates  
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2.(C) At a May 12 DTP party meeting, members unanimously agreed to run the party's candidates as independents in the July 22 parliamentary elections, according to Orhan Miroglu, DTP Vice President for International Relations. Miroglu told us the party hopes to attract voters who, knowing the party would not surpass the 10 per cent election threshold, viewed a vote for DTP as a "throw-away" in previous elections. The party also is courting candidates from outside DTP who support a peaceful resolution to the Kurdish problem to run as independents under one umbrella. Party leaders are in talks with Hakpar and Participatory Democracy Party (KADEP), as well as non-Kurdish candidates from left-leaning NGOs such as the Turkish Medical Doctors' Association and the DISK labor union. DTP expects to announce a list of candidates between May 27 and 29.

3.(C) Miroglu saw the decision to run candidates as independents as a major turning point in Turkish political history. Not only will it allow Kurds to enter parliament, but it will lead to a new unity among Kurds who support a nonviolent, democratic platform and isolate those who support using violence to resolve the Kurdish problem, he said.

4.(C) Leaders of smaller pro-Kurdish parties Hakpar and KADEP are considering running under a DTP umbrella even though they have repeatedly told us they would not affiliate themselves with DTP. Hakpar president Sertac Bucak told us he is in ongoing talks with DTP Chairman Ahmet Turk regarding possible participation. His main condition is that all candidates agree to pursue a nonviolent solution to the Kurdish problem.

Hakpar has been influential in pushing DTP toward a more moderate stance and would continue to do so in any coalition.

KADEP President Serafettin Elci, a former Minister of Public Works, told us he is weighing his options but has not ruled out running with such a pro-Kurdish bloc.

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Turkey's Kurdish SE: Electoral Arithmetic  
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5.(C) Miroglu told us DTP's analysts predict that independents under DTP's umbrella will win between 37-50 seats. Non-DTP Kurdish contacts see that as wildly optimistic. Hasim Hasimi, a former Motherland Party (Anavatan) MP and mayor of Cizre, said he expects DTP's independents to win approximately 20 seats. Hasimi believes the AKP has brought concrete economic development to the southeast, in contrast to DTP's "empty promises," stale rhetoric, and perceived links to the PKK. Hasimi and other regional contacts have indicated that DTP's decision to run

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independents does not sit well with everyone: some who had been considering a run as independents are now looking to join established parties' lists so as not to be associated with DTP, which they see as too radicalized and unrepresentative of the region's conservative values.

6.(C) The reality likely lies somewhere in between. Turkey's eastern region plays a minor role in the overall election picture: the 13 pro-Kurdish eastern provinces have a combined population of less than 5 million and only 55 of Turkey's 550 parliamentary seats. (Greater Istanbul alone has 70 seats in parliament.) The region nevertheless will be closely watched, as DTP attempts to end 13 years without parliamentary representation. DTP plans to run 63 candidates in the southeast and in regions with large Kurdish migrant populations, such as Adana, Mersin, Ankara, and Istanbul. Any DTP gains would likely come largely at the expense of ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which currently holds 36 of seats in the southeast. Some of the main opposition Republican People's Party's (CHP) 14 seats could also be at risk.

7.(C) Despite winning over 40 percent of the vote in five eastern provinces in the 1997 and 2002 elections, DTP's predecessor, the Democratic People's Party (DEHAP), was shut out of parliament for failing, as a party, to surpass the 10 percent threshold. No such threshold applies for independents, who must simply garner a certain percentage of the vote in their district. AKP MP Koksali Toptan said DTP's presence in parliament could lead to progress on economic and social problems in the southeast. But if pro-Kurdish independents focus on Kurdish nationalism instead, they risk sparking serious fighting within parliament, he said, particularly if ultranationalist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) also crosses the threshold. "Kurdish ethnic nationalism versus Turkish ethnic nationalism will be a very dangerous conflict for Turkey," Toptan warned.

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Attempts to Hamper DTP's Plans

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8.(C) Largely to block potential DTP gains, parliament recently adopted -- and the President just signed -- a constitutional amendment to require that independent candidates be listed on the main ballots rather than on separate slips. DTP believes the amendment will have little impact, but many election analysts predict that DTP's supporters, many of whom are illiterate, are likely to find the long, cumbersome ballots confusing. Other parties may try to further handicap independents' chances by encouraging nuisance candidates with similar names to run. Miroglu said that if any party adopted such a strategy, DTP would "shut down" the election by responding in kind, introducing hundreds of candidates with names such as "Erdogan", "Baykal", or "Mumcu."

9.(C) Kurdish contacts view the amendment as a clear sign of fears that a DTP parliamentary presence would provide a platform for the PKK. One Kurdish contact told us that the amendment indicates that "neither Erdogan nor other politicians are sincere or ready for the resolution of Kurdish conflict within the parliamentary-democratic system."

Another characterized the amendment as part of a broader state-sponsored effort, including arrests and harassment of DTP's leadership (ref A) and increased military operations in the southeast (ref B), to keep a pro-Kurdish bloc out of parliament. Military operations, he continued, would turn voters away from the parliamentary system and toward the PKK, which argues that its policy of confrontation is needed to win concessions from the GOT.

10.(C) Comment: DTP leaders are doggedly pursuing a pragmatic strategy to enter parliament. By running independents, DTP can make a credible claim to supporters that it will cross the threshold this time. Success, however, will depend on many unknowns. One factor is whether, if the courts pursue a closure case against DTP, that will affect the status of the independent candidates. Another one, sure to throw the party's plans into chaos, would be resumption of military-PKK clashes in the region.

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This consideration could play a role in the PKK's decision whether to continue or abrogate their current ceasefire. End comment.

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